

Road Smitten:

Hooked on the MS Bike Ride

BY OLIVIA LINDLY AND ROCHELLE KRAUT

Two people show that if you give a bike a try, you just might get hooked on the high of riding the MS Bike Ride.

Pushed to ride by the “Lagers”

Lloyd von Sprecken first got involved with the MS Bike Ride in 1996 because his son Todd, an avid cyclist, was riding. He volunteered on the overnight and helped at the finish line the next day. The very next year Lloyd was diagnosed with MS.

“I was 60 years old. My foot-dragging had started about four years earlier. My family thought it was just a muscle problem. Then came the numbness a year before diagnosis.”

For the next two years, Lloyd again volunteered while Todd and other family members rode. “The team kept encouraging me to ride,” he said. “They said ‘get that old bugger out there!’”



Left: Lloyd (front, left) and Todd (right) von Sprecken with members of Lloyd's Lagers
Below: Lloyd ... and a lager



Road challenged

There are some notable "high points" on the Land Rover Miramar MS 150 Bay to Bay Bike Ride—the

steep hills. "Tandems are heavier than other bikes," Lloyd said. "We'd have to walk it if it wasn't for a few 'animals' on the team who grab the back of our bike and help push us up those hills with their pedal power."

It didn't seem possible for someone with walking and balance problems, Lloyd recalled. But in 1999, Todd turned up with an old tandem bike he'd found. "I hadn't been on a bike for years. I'd never done any serious cycling," Lloyd said.

On the road to 150

So how do you get from point zero to 150 miles? "In Orange County, California, we can bike all year round and there are lots of great trails," Lloyd said. "Once a week, Todd and I get on the tandem and meet other members of our team for a 10 to 15 mile ride."

The downhill is another story. "The momentum—that's a real thrill!" But Lloyd added that a tandem needs some getting used to. "It's a control issue. All I can do—as the stoker—is pedal. Your partner—the captain—steers and controls the brakes. It's all about trust."

Are there other challenges? "Getting up on day two after the overnight

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party!" Lloyd said. The party-ready spirit of Lloyd's Lagers, named for the team's appreciation of a certain cold, foamy beverage, has made it one of the top fund raisers in the Pacific South Coast Chapter. Lloyd's family is now one of several family groups on the team riding for relatives with MS.

Lloyd's family is involved with other work for the MS cause too. His son Blake organizes golf tournaments and was a mover behind the MS Band of Hope. Recently Blake started a foundation that partners with online businesses to make it easy for customers to donate to charity. Their motto is "After all, it's just a buck." Go to www.thebuckstartshere.org to learn more.

Lloyd's prescription

At 69, Lloyd looks forward to many more years of riding. This year he has a brand new tandem bicycle—a birthday gift from his three sons. He maintains

Make it a bandana year!

Every year, thousands of people "join the movement" to walk, ride and raise funds for a world free of MS. But there's more to do. Make a personal connection by joining **Champions Against MS™**. This program links individual event participants with a person living with MS. They have a chance to learn about each other. During events, Champions foster awareness and hope by wearing a bright bandana signed by their MS partner. To learn more, go to www.nationalmssociety.org/champions.

that biking has helped his general health, his fatigue—and even slowed his disease progression.

Does he recommend riding? "You meet great people, have fun, and feel good. I take a great satisfaction that with my age and my disability people can look at me and say, 'If he can do it, then so can I.' I hope to see more people with MS riding each year."

The "Wonders" believe in doing

"We will find a cure, now I'm a believer of that I'm sure, it's why we ride," goes the catchy refrain from the team song of Stevie's Wonders, the largest friends and family team in Minnesota's MS 150 Bike Ride presented by GMAC ResCap. The team has grown from eight to 80 members since 2001, and Lisa Gustafson, the team captain, expects at least 50 new riders this year.



Stevie's Wonders in action



Above: The family that bikes together ... Steven Christenson (seated) with his sister Lisa (right) and her husband, Ken, and daughter, Melissa

Family affair

The team is named after Lisa's brother, Steven, who was diagnosed with MS at the age of 27. Steven's MS progressed rapidly, forcing him to retire when he was 33.

Although Steven's diagnosis was initially very traumatic for the family, Lisa said they have now adapted to the day-to-day realities. Four years ago, Steven and his parents, Chuck and Barb, moved into the basement apartment of Lisa's home.

Together we ride

Lisa's husband, their two children, brother-in-law, and Steven's son Daniel all ride. "The thought of serious biking never crossed my mind," Lisa told

InsideMS. "But my husband had done the MS Bike Ride in the 1980s. Other friends and family got interested. It kind of mushroomed on its own." Now, Lisa and her friends on the team jokingly refer to themselves as "bike geeks."

Gearing Up

Minnesota winters put road biking on hold. So in April, the team schedules training rides every weekend. "I've never joined a gym," said Lisa, but to train through the winter, she purchased a stationary bike so she can cycle.

"Riding on the weekend of the MS 150 is much easier than the training," she said, "because when you're actually on the ride, that's your mission. You aren't distracted by other things."

Steven is now one of 15 individuals with MS for whom this team rides. Each year, Steven greets the whole gang at the overnight



Lisa's training wheels

in Hinckley, Minnesota. This is Lisa's favorite part of the ride, because she gets to see so many of her friends and family united by a common cause.

"When someone has MS, you want to do something," Lisa said. "I believe that cycling in the MS Bike Ride is moving us closer to finding a cure." ■

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